



City of Somerville

# URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

## OCTOBER 27, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

| NAME            | TITLE    | STATUS         | ARRIVED |
|-----------------|----------|----------------|---------|
| Sarah Lewis     | Co-Chair | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Luisa Oliveira  | Co-Chair | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Frank Valdes    | Member   | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Deborah Fennick | Member   | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Andrew Arbaugh  | Member   | <i>Present</i> |         |

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Co-Chair, Sarah Lewis at 6:04pm and adjourned at 8:29pm.

Others present: Senior Planner Cortney Kirk, *Public Space & Urban Forestry*

### DESIGN REVIEW: 379 Somerville Avenue

(Continued from October 13, 2020)

William Chalfant, Project Manager from Khalsa Design Inc., presented design changes made to the landscaped open space behind the building. The space is now proposed as a formal garden that will function as an amenity for the ground story commercial space and sensory amenity to residents living in the upper stories (sight, smell, and sound). The proposed green roof is not accessible outside of maintenance and will use a 6-10" tray system for plantings. Mr. Chalfant also presented design changes made to the recommended façade design option based on feedback provided at the previous meeting.

Member Arbaugh discussed the formal design of the rear landscaped open space and questioned whether the proposed paving materials would meet ADA & MAAB requirements if it is intended to be accessed by residents or customers of the commercial space. Mr. Arbaugh recommended that the garden design be reconceptualized with a more contemporary aesthetic (such as a less traditional and formal fountain) and that the planting schedule include native plants. Member Fennick discussed the top story fenestration and suggested that it need not be centered with such formal trim, but that the design was acceptable if its location correlates well with the interior design of the upper story dwelling unit. Mr. Arbaugh returned to the landscaped rear open space and encouraged the development team to design the space to be useable by the tenants.

Following a motion by Member Valdez seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) that all of the applicable design guidelines have been met by the recommended design option and revised design character of the building. The Commission chose not to identify any priority design guidelines. Following a motion by Member Arbaugh seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to request an updated landscape plan for the rear open space for review and comment by the UDC.

**RESULT:**

**RECOMMENDED**

## DESIGN REVIEW: 371 Highland Avenue

William Chalfant, Project Manager from Khalsa Design Inc., presented an overview of the proposed 4-story General Building with 22 dwelling units and a commercial space, bike room, and a residential lobby at the ground story. Thirteen underground structured parking spaces and a vehicular entrance fronting Highland Avenue are proposed. Four new street trees are proposed along with improvements to the abutting public sidewalk. The building is over 100 feet wide and must comply with a design standard of the zoning ordinance to appear to be multiple buildings. Mr. Chalfant reviewed three façade design options that make the structure appear two smaller buildings. Each option maintains the same design for the left side of the façade, while the right-side changes in each option.

Commission Member Valdes commented that the overall design of the entire building appears as at least three buildings because the rear is designed to appear different than the front façade and commented that there are too many materials used across the two (three) designs. Member Fennick commented that the use of an architectural language from two different time periods was not successful and suggested that even though required to appear as two buildings, that the designs need to relate to each other. Just dividing the building into two and making one side one style and the other another style did not have any design integrity. Members Valdes and Fennick both preferred design option #3 and suggested a less literal interpretation in relation to using multiple architectural styles to achieve the “two (2) or more separate and distinct facades of differing architectural treatment” required by zoning. Member Valdes again suggested reducing the number of materials and using some of the same materials for each façade design so that the sides reference each other. Mr. Chalfant suggested revising the design to be two traditional façades or two contemporary façades rather than a traditional and a contemporary. The Commission members generally agreed.

Co-Chair Luisa Oliveira and Senior Planner Cortney Kirk requested additional materials to properly review the proposed public realm improvements (new street trees) and other publicly visible landscaping. Members Arbaugh and Fennick asked about the parking entrance on Highland Avenue and raised concerns about the driveway aprons and curb cuts. Mr. Chalfant explained that the entrance was designed just as an opening with no door. Member Arbaugh requested the revised design to include a door for the garage entrance.

The Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue the meeting to the next regularly scheduled meeting date.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> |
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## DESIGN REVIEW: 494 Medford Street

James Rissling, principal of LR Designs of Cambridge, MA presented an overview of the proposed 4-story General Building with 2 dwelling units, a single ground story commercial space, and two parking spaces tucked under the rear of the building. A total of four façade design options were presented to the Commission. Mr. Rissling explained that inspiration was taken from surrounding buildings for the specific design characteristics reflected in the presented options.

Member Fennick preferred façade design option #4 because the materials and colors better reflected the character of a commercial district and that this building would serve as the first building with commercial space as one approached Magoun Square from the east. Member Arbaugh identified façade design option #2 as least preferred and Member Valdes identified option #2 as least preferred. Member Valdes expressed support for façade design option #4 but commented that the brick treatment at the ground story didn't connect well with the other materials used for the remainder of the façade. He added that the feature preferred from façade design option #1 (and option #2) was the strongly defined base with the upper stories appearing to sit on top. Members Valdes and Fennick supported incorporating a more well-

defined base like option #1 into façade design option #4. Member Fennick suggested providing more clarity around the façade design correlating with the commercial space. Member Valdes asked to see an elevation of the Medford Street facade and to see the massing of the proposed building in context with the existing structures nearby. Member Valdes also suggested that the materials used for the balconies be contemporary in nature.

Following a motion by Member Valdes seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend façade design option #4 (corrected reference from option #3 in video) for further design development.

The Commission asked the applicant to incorporate the design feedback provided into an updated concept and voted unanimously (3-0) to continue the meeting to the next regularly scheduled meeting date.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

### **DESIGN REVIEW: 44 Broadway**

Philip Sima, founder and principal architect from Balance Architects of Boston, presented an overview of the proposed 6-story General Building with 91 dwelling units, ground story commercial space, and underground vehicular parking. The building fronts three streets: Broadway, George (left), and Mt Vernon (right). At 200 feet wide, the building must comply with a design standard of the zoning ordinance to appear to be multiple buildings. Mr. Sima reviewed the surrounding context of existing structures in the neighborhood, the massing of the proposed building responding to the required setbacks and upper story step backs, and highlighted the outdoor amenity spaces and other features of building. The approximately 11,200 sf ground story commercial space is currently not demised into multiple commercial spaces, but Mr. Sima stated that the intent is to tenant the building with multiple local or small businesses and that the ground floor space can accommodate three to four individual spaces. Potential outdoor seating areas or mini pocket plazas are proposed for the frontage area at both secondary frontages (side streets).

Three façade design options were presented to the Commission through various elevation and perspective drawings by Mr. Sima. Option #1 was called Brownstone Massing, Option #2 was identified as Light/Dark, and Option #3 was referred to a Red Corner and drew inspiration from the prior options. Option #2 (Light/Dark) was identified as the design team's preferred option.

The design team presented an additional façade design option that located the vehicular entrance to the underground parking at the front of the building. The Commission debated whether the option was compliant with the zoning ordinance momentarily, but Commission Member Arbaugh, as a former resident of the neighborhood and citing the high level of pedestrian foot traffic along this section of Broadway, sternly argued that a vehicular entrance at the front of the building would be highly inappropriate and negatively impact the public realm.

Mr. Sima also presented three options for the design of the lobby entrance for the upper story residential.

Commission member Valdes asked what the logic was used for deciding where the various options were divided vertically to appear as multiple buildings. Mr. Sima explained that the primary driver was the scale and length of the ground floor commercial spaces and 30 foot storefronts as it relates to human scale. Member Valdes expressed a preference façade design option #1 (Light/Dark) and discussed the specific materials for each side with the design team. Member Fennick also expressed support for design option #1, but suggested that the massing of the dark "building" (right side) be adjusted to better anchor the appearance of two buildings and that the logic for the massing of that portion should change as compared to the other portion. Member Valdes recommended emphasizing the material that vertically frames the windows on the light side of the building and to utilize different details for each side to help differentiate each "building", even if the same windows were being used for each side. In support of member

Arbaugh's comment earlier, member Valdes also addressed the location of the vehicular entrance and recommended that it be located on a side street due to the detrimental impact it would cause to the pedestrian experience on Broadway and design of the facade. Twenty-six cars coming and going was not seen as detrimental as locating the vehicular entrance on the front of the building. Member Arbaugh agreed.

Member Arbaugh commented that the small plazas or café areas at either end of the building felt like left over space and wished the design of those spaces had the same weight and impact as the architectural design of the building. If there was a choice between relocating the blue bikes station and adding another tree to the streetscape, member Arbaugh prefers the tree. Member Fennick commented the appearance of the façade materials and landscaping would go well together and suggested additional ground level landscaping be provided at the front of the building. Member Arbaugh commented that perhaps the massing of the building could go hand in hand with the landscape design so that it appeared more intentional rather than remnant.

Following a motion by member Fennick seconded by member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend façade design option #1 (Light/Dark) for further design development.

Following a motion by member Arbaugh seconded by member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the vehicular entrance be located on the George Street facade.

Following a motion by Member Valdez seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) that the design guideline recommending a two-story base was not necessary due to the massing and proposed design option.

Following a motion by Member Valdez seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) that all of the applicable design guidelines have been met by the recommended design option.

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| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>RECOMMENDED</b> |
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